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ABSTRACT

Research verifies that successful reading and writing programs need administrative support. One way to get administrative support is for teachers to convince their administrators that they know what works best for children in their classroom. Teachers can help in moving from practice to research and can gain the support of their administrators by quoting research, doing and sharing research, writing for publication, recognizing excellence, changing the curriculum, and encouraging administrators. If funding is received at Miami University, for example, a project to develop and implement a program to prepare secondary English Education students to conduct classroom research will be undertaken. Wonderful things can go on in schools if thinking teachers and administrators communicate with each other, trust their judgment, and verify their practices through research. (RS)

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FROM PRACTICE TO RESEARCH FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Allen Berger is Chair, Studies and Research Committee, OCIRA. This paper was presented at Administrators and Teachers: Collaboration Through Communication, a session at the National Council of Teachers of English Convention, Seattle, November 22, 1991.

Throughout the nation there is a gradual shift in the balance between teachers and researchers. Instead of teachers being at the low end of the teeter-totter, things are moving in a healthier direction. This is desirable because, as Margaret Early, Past President of NCTE, has said in *Secondary School Reading: What Research Reveals for Classroom Practice* (a landmark volume co-published by NCRE, NCTE, and ERIC):

> It [research] affirms what thinking teachers have known, or suspected, about the reading process and about reading materials and how students learn, or fail to learn, in the complex setting in which teachers work every day. To cast research in a supportive role in no way demeans it. Teachers, and especially administrators, need to have their assumptions verified.

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One of the assumptions that research verifies is that successful reading and writing programs need administrative support. One way to get that

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support is for teachers to convince their administrators that they know what works best for children in their classroom. In this paper I'll focus on ways in which practice can inform research.

Quoting Research

One way for teachers to use practice as a springboard is to quote research. Wayne Otto, who writes a column for the *Journal of Reading*, says that he's interested in how educators quote research. He says that if they say REsearch says--noticeably accenting the RE--as in The *Bible* says--and if they *thump* the research document, then he gets worried. But if they say reSEARCH, with the accent on the *search*, then he feels a bit more relieved. So teachers who are convinced that something works--whether it's moving toward the writing process or whole language or multi-media response to literature--can approach their administrators, either individually or as a group--and convey their professional beliefs supported by observations and the appropriate findings of re*search*.

Doing and Disseminating Research

Another way for teachers to gain the support of their administrators is to do their own research. The term, *action research*, has been bandied about for a long time, but the word, *reflective*, is now being added to the lexicon of teachers and future teachers. Whether one has time to reflect or not, who can argue with the prestige of research? A teacher--with or without financial help from NCTE or IRA, their affiliates, or any other organization--whether for or not for a masters or a doctorate or whatever--can smuggle excellent practices into the classroom through research. Who can argue, particularly if the study wins an award?

The Studies and Research Committee of the Ohio Council, IRA, each year recommends the awarding of up to $500 to a teacher or administrator

interested in doing a study. The committee also oversees a session for teachers, administrators, students--or any combination--interested in sharing their ongoing or recently completed research at the annual state conference. I mention this because each year I'm surprised that so few teachers or administrators express interest (through writing a four-page proposal) to obtain the money, and that so few students express interest (on a half sheet of paper) in sharing their research. In effect, I'm suggesting: "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Of interest may be some of the titles of studies that teachers have recently proposed for the $500 award--studies that have come out of their own classroom practices:

Fourth Grade Pen Pals and the Elderly

Individualized Reading and Cooperative Learning With Trade Books

Changing to a Literature-Based Reading Program

Developing a Study Unit to Improve Teacher-Student Interaction

Improving Reading Scores Through Literature-Based Instruction

Following are some of the titles of studies that students have shared during the research session at the annual state conference:

The Effects of Predictable Materials on First Graders' Reading Comprehension: A Teacher Action Research Study

Effects of Assisted Repeated Reading on the Overall Comprehension and Fluency of Third Grade Students Reading Below Grade Level

Relationships Among Elementary Teacher Attitudes Toward Educational Issues and Decisions, Teacher Theoretical Orientations to Reading, Student Attitude Toward Reading, and Student Reading Achievement

The committee also oversees the writing of an article in the Research in Action section in each issue of the *Ohio Reading Teacher*. Some titles of recently published research-related articles:

Reading Recovery: An Early Intervention Program

Characteristics of Midwestern Middle Grade Reading Programs: A Regional Survey

Trading on Our Knowledge of Tradebooks

Some needed studies which in effect reveal how practitioners are in front of researchers deal with cloze and poetry. Do a computer-search on *poetry*, and you'll find a multitude of references; do a computer-search on *cloze*, and you'll also find a multitude of references; but if you do a computer-search using *poetry* and *cloze*, you'll find only a handful of references, hardly any of which are research. Yet across our land there are thousands of teachers who are using variations of cloze (even though they may not call it that) when they teach poetry. Another example of how thinking teachers are on top of the teeter-totter is children's drama: researchers only now are moving up to practitioners who have been doing dramatic activities involving role playing and creative interpretations with children in classrooms throughout the nation, according to John Stewig, Past President, National Council of Teachers of English.

Writing for Publication

Many teachers can share practical ideas in professional journals when they take courses. Instead of finals some professors encourage students to write articles. With one-on-one attention through the whole process individual professors at Miami University have helped students write articles that have appeared (under the students' names) in *Language Arts, English Journal, The Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, Science and Children,* and many state journals including the *Oklahoma English Journal,* the *Indiana Reading Quarterly,* and the *Ohio Reading Teacher.* This gives students courage to follow through on their convictions as they move toward research.

Recognizing Excellence

As at many other universities, we at Miami University honor practitioners in many ways. In 1991 we awarded the first Joyce Barnes Farmer Distinguished Guest Professorship. This honor goes to an inner-city school teacher recommended by the Heckert Reading and Writing Center and approved by the Chair of the Department of Teacher Education and the Dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions. The recipient gains a great deal of prestige and gives lectures and presentations to the local chapter of Kappa Delta Pi, the honorary organization for men and women in education. The recipient also talks to students in teacher education courses at the university. The first recipient of the award is Patricia Priore, a middle-school teacher in Porter Middle School in Cincinnati; she is also a teacher in our Teens for Literacy Program.

The Heckert Center also presents an annual award to a person in the southwest Ohio/tri-state area who makes outstanding contributions to children and literature. The prestigious Silver Gertie Award--named after the children's book, *Gertie the Duck*--has been given to librarians, teachers,

consultants, and radio-TV personalities who have made major efforts to bring children and teachers together. (Co-authored by Nicholas Georgiady of Miami University, the book is based on the life of an actual duck that made a home for its family in the worst part of the Milwaukee River.) The Gertie Award is given during the Eileen Tway Children's Literature Conference each spring. The center also gives awards--$1,000 and $100, respectively--to outstanding graduate and undergraduate students in English language arts at Miami University. We encourage these and other students to move easily from practice to research and back again.

In the past the Heckert Reading and Writing Center has given awards--named Diogenes Awards--to one hundred excellent language arts teachers identified by their principals. Recipients have shared miniature lessons at specially arranged conferences in southwestern Ohio. The Diogenes Awards were established by the late Eileen Tway whom many know personally or professionally through her work for NCTE, her column for seven years in *Language Arts*, her presidency of the National Conference on Research in English, or her winning of the Arbuthnot Award (for the world's outstanding teacher of children's and adolescent literature) from the International Reading Association. Winners feel encouraged as they go about their work in classrooms and schools.

Changing the Curriculum

If we receive funding, we at Miami University plan to involve excellent English/language arts teachers in a three-year project to develop and implement a program to prepare secondary English Education students to conduct classroom research focusing on their own students. With cooperation from our colleagues we will change six key English and Teacher Education courses to include work in classroom research. We also plan to

change the student-teaching experience so that the students conduct classroom research. We aim to introduce students to a variety of useful methods to conduct classroom research, show students how the results of classroom research can be used to improve instruction, and guide students as they design, conduct and apply the results of their own research projects. The program will be a joint venture of two departments--English and Teacher Education--and two schools--Arts and Sciences and Education and Allied Professions.

Encouraging Administrators

For teachers to implement worthwhile teaching practices, administrators need to be informed. Many need your encouragement. If they don't already, please encourage them to read to your students. Share with them a copy of your favorite reading or language arts journal. Invite them to come with you to local, state, or national conferences of NCTE or IRA. Indeed, encourage them not only to come but to participate on the programs of conferences and conventions. Encourage them to take literacy courses with you or to participate in the national writing projects that are on campuses all around the country.

If administrators haven't found literacy long ago, they may come to it in unusual ways. Before dawn recently I traveled to a school that appeared to be in the middle of nowhere. In talking with the principal before school opened, he praised his new reading and writing center. I asked how it started. He replied that when he was a youngster going to school, he was told that he couldn't write well. Recently, however, as an adult a friend had asked him to help write a song. He replied that he couldn't write. Encouraged by his friend, he fell in love with writing to the extent that he not only helped establish a well-endowed reading and writing center, praising the teacher who

runs it, but also gives talks about reading and writing at nearby elementary and secondary schools.

In short, all these ideas--quoting, doing, and sharing research, writing for publication, recognizing excellence, changing the curriculum and encouraging administrators--help in moving from practice to research. They are being done in many places. They can be done, if they aren't already, in your own hometown. What never ceases to amaze me are the wonderful things in education that go on in schools in tiny towns and great cities because thinking teachers and administrators communicate with each other, trust their judgment, and verify their practices through research.

Notes

Margaret Early's comments appear in "Epilogue: New Students, New Teachers, New Demands," *Secondary School Reading: What Research Reveals for Classroom Practice* (1982), edited by Allen Berger and H. Alan Robinson, and published by NCTE in conjunction with its Commission on Reading, the National Conference on Research in English, and ERIC.

Wayne Otto's comments appear in *Leaders for Literacy: Papers from the First Conference* (June 20-22, 1988), edited by Allen Berger, Miami University.

John Stewig's comments were made at a meeting of the NCTE Committee on Communicating Research-Based Knowledge of Language Learning and Curriculum to School Administrators, 81st Annual NCTE Convention, Seattle, November 22, 1991.

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